

4.25.07 - Rahall Again Pushing For Proper Funding of Appalachian Regional Commission

WASHINGTON, DC - Continuing his fight to maintain the Appalachian Regional Commission's (ARC) ability to offer essential service to West Virginia and portions of twelve other states the ARC has provided for over thirty years, U.S. Rep. Nick Rahall, D-WV, is again working to get Congress to fund the ARC at a level that will allow it to fulfill its mission.

"The ARC has meant and continues to mean jobs for West Virginians," Rahall said. "It has been fundamental in the growth of our State's infrastructure and it is an essential tool in the development of our communities. West Virginia is the center of Appalachia and the Appalachian Regional Commission is central to West Virginia's future economic growth."

Today, Rahall, joined by fellow members of the U.S. House of Representatives, asked that the U.S. Congress fund the ARC in the amount of \$75 million, a modest increase which will help the ARC more aggressively approach its goals. Over the last 10 years, funding for the ARC, for which Rahall has fought time and time again under Republican leadership, has not increased, while the region continues to receive less federal assistance per capita than the rest of the country.

According to a recent analysis completed by the University of North Carolina Environmental Financing Center, the counties in the ARC region require estimated investments of \$11.4 billion to meet current drinking water needs and \$14.3 billion for wastewater needs. This is substantially more than the funding that is currently available from combined state and federal programs. Rural areas also continue to lag behind the Nation in access to cable modem and DSL services and other forms of high-speed Internet access.

"Programs like the ARC are as important today as they ever have been, if not more so," Rahall said. "We all know the deployment of telecommunications infrastructure throughout West Virginia is absolutely necessary if we hope to compete in the national and global economies."

The ARC has proven itself a good steward of the funding it receives. For example, in FY 2006, across all investment areas, each dollar of ARC funding was matched by \$3.14 in non-ARC public project funding, and each ARC dollar invested leveraged \$11.55 in private investment in ARC projects over time.

"We've got something that is working, and we need to keep it going," Rahall said.

In recent years, Rahall has partnered with the ARC on a number of projects to benefit West Virginia, including an ARC grant of \$376,000 that will go to Concord University's Rahall Center to begin operation of a Small Business Incubator and Entrepreneurial Studies Program to support enterprise growth and train new entrepreneurs in the area. The University projects that 20 new jobs will be created and four new companies formed as a result of these activities, and 40 student scholarships will be provided to the Entrepreneurial Studies Program.

Rahall also announced a \$100,000 award to help with the development of a shared-use commercial kitchen, commonly known as a "kitchen incubator," to be located in the old Ashland Company Store near the trailhead of the Hatfield-McCoy ATV Trail. The facility, which helps individuals supplement their income by giving them access to approved equipment and workspaces, is expected to provide equipment and technical assistance to ten new businesses within its first three years of operation, creating 15 new jobs. A \$48,000 ARC grant was awarded to the Tamarack Foundation to create a

One-Stop Resource Center to train and provide resources to the State's artisan entrepreneurs and

The efforts of Congressman Rahall and the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) also are helping small businesses in southern West Virginia obtain access to broadband technology and increase their profit by opening their doors to the global economy through the Internet. Through the E-commerce training initiatives being offered by ARC and others, Rahall is working to connect local small businesses to broadband, opening doors to Internet sales and services that just weren't there a couple of years ago.

"It is ARC's ability to serve its mission by adapting its actions to fit the times that makes ARC such an invaluable resource to Appalachia and the Nation," Rahall said. "From the Appalachian Development Highway System to the E-commerce and broadband initiatives, ARC continues to serve its mission by advocating for and partnering with the people of Appalachia to create opportunities for self-sustaining economic development and improved quality of life. I applaud the efforts of Federal Co-Chair Anne Pope who, as a native daughter of Appalachia, executes so well the mission of ARC in each of Appalachia's communities and encourage my colleagues to allow the agency to continue its important work."